CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A method comprising:

capturing an image;

determining if the image has changed, and if the image has changed, sending the image to a server; and

if the image has not changed with a period, sending a heartbeat to indicate continued functionality.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein determining if the image has changed comprises detecting motion in the image.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein sending a heartbeat is smaller, and thus uses less bandwidth than sending an image.

4. The method of claim 3, wherein the heartbeat comprises a compressed version of the unchanged image, including a time stamp.

5. The method of claim 3, wherein the heartbeat comprises a time stamp.

6. The method of claim 3, wherein the heartbeat is a single bit.

7. An apparatus comprising:

a camera for obtaining images;

an interface to send a new image if the new image is different from the old image; and

a heartbeat logic to send a heartbeat signal, if the new image has not been different from the old image in a period of time.

8. The apparatus of claim 7, further comprising:

a motion detector to compare the new image with the old image, and determine if the new image is different from the old image.

9. The apparatus of claim 7, wherein the camera periodically obtains a new image.

10. The apparatus of claim 7, further comprising a timer, the timer reset every time the interface send a new image, and the timer indicating to the heartbeat logic to send the heartbeat signal, if the timer reaches a value.

11. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein sending a heartbeat is smaller, and thus uses less bandwidth than sending an image.

12. The apparatus of claim 11, wherein the heartbeat comprises a compressed version of the unchanged image, including a time stamp.

13. The apparatus of claim 11, wherein the heartbeat comprises a time stamp.

14. ~~A method of obtaining images and a status of a camera, the method~~ comprising:

sending a new image, if the new image is different from an old image; and

sending a ~~heartbeat, if the new image is not~~ different from the old image.

15. The method of claim 14, ~~wherein the~~ new image is send periodically at a first rate, ~~and the~~ heartbeat is sent periodically at a second rate.

16. ~~The method of claim 15, wherein the heartbeat~~ is sent only if a

series of new images were the same as the old images.

17. The method of claim 14, further comprising:

using a first timer to periodically send the new images; and

using a second timer, to send the heartbeat, if no new images were sent within a period.

18. The method of claim 17, further comprising resetting the second timer when the new image is sent.

19. A system of providing images to a user, the system comprising:

a plurality of cameras for periodically obtaining images;

a camera control system to collect images from the plurality of cameras, the camera control system including:

a comparison logic to determine whether a new image obtained by a camera is different from an old image obtained by the camera;

a heartbeat logic to generate a heartbeat signal, if the new image has not been different from the old image in a period of time; and

an interface to send the new images that are different from old images through a network;

a server to receive the images from the camera control system and server them to the user.

20. The system of claim 19, wherein the interface further sends a heartbeat for those cameras that have not had an image sent in a previous set of cycles.